

NSC BRIEFING

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19 April 1955

MAY DAY FLY-BY

- I. The first of the USSR's two annual aerial parades is little more than a week away.
  - A. Close watch of the Moscow skies has begun, since parades and rehearsals have previously offered insight to Soviet air progress.
  - B. This watch was first rewarded on 6 April, when three, or possibly six, four-engine jet heavy bombers were sighted, rehearsing for May Day.
    1. A second rehearsal displayed three of the same bombers on 7 April.
    2. Two more practice fly-by's (14 and 17 April) exhibited as many as six of the heavy bombers together.
- II. A single prototype of this heavy bomber was flown as part of the May Day air parade in '54.
  - A. Use of a prototype on May Day broke a six-year Soviet (August) precedent of waiting until Aviation Day, the second of the annual aerial parades, to display new aircraft types.
- III. The simultaneous sighting of as many as six of the new heavy bombers suggests that the Soviet jet heavy bomber program is substantially more advanced than previously estimated.
  - A. These estimates were based on the assumption that heavy seen during last year's rehearsals and parade was a single prototype.

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DOCUMENT NO. 14  
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐  
☐ DECLASSIFIED  
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS 9  
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 1990  
AUTH: HR 70-2  
DATE: 000500040012-5 000514

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B. The estimates held that the second such jet heavy bomber would not be produced until the third quarter of 1955.

1. From this, it was held that jet heavy bombers would appear in operational units of the Soviet Air Force by the end of 1955.

2. It was further held that 50 heavies would be in service by mid-1957.

C. The extent to which these estimates must be revised will depend on the sightings during this year's May Day fly-by.

1. The six heavies already seen will require revision of the present estimate.

2. Should several more heavies fly by, the revision will be further affected.

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